

Merritt Parkway, Rippowam River Bridge
Spanning the Rippowam River at the 10.18 mile mark
on the Merritt Parkway
Stamford
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-78

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Contemporary Photographs, Jet Lowe, 1993
Historic Photographs Copied By, B. Devon Perkins, 1992

- CT-78-1 HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH, VIEW OF BRIDGE SPANNING THE RIPPOWAM RIVER, CARRYING THE MERRITT PARKWAY, CA. 1940. COLLECTION
- CT-78-2 VIEW ALONG THE MERRITT PARKWAY AT THE RETAINING WALL OF THE RIPPOWAM RIVER BRIDGE.
- CT-78-3 VIEW ALONG THE RIPPOWAN RIVER LOOKING AT BRIDGE CARRYING THE MERRITT PARKWAY.

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Merritt Parkway, Rippowam River Bridge

HAER No. CT-78

Location: Spanning the Rippowam River at the 10.18 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Stamford, Fairfield County, Connecticut

UTM: 18.621240.4551570
Quad: Stamford, Connecticut

Construction Date: 1936

Engineer: Connecticut Highway Department

Architect: George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.

Contractor: Paul Bacco Construction Company
Stamford, Connecticut

Present Owner: Connecticut Department of Transportation
Wethersfield, Connecticut

Present Use: Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross the Rippowam River

Significance: The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.

Historians: Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian
Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer
August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

LOCAL HISTORY

In 1640, agents of the New Haven Colony bought land on the banks of the Rippowam River where it meets the Long Island Sound. The following year, twenty-nine families from Wethersfield purchased these lands and moved there under the leadership of the Reverend Adam Davenport. The small settlement took the name Stamford even though it was still under the jurisdiction of the New Haven Colony. Stamford would continue to grow, and at one point included parts of Greenwich, Bedford, Pound Ridge, New Canaan, and Darien. In 1685, Stamford received its town patent from the Connecticut General Assembly. By 1700 its population had grown to 585; over the next century this number increased dramatically to 4,465.¹

"Stamford began as a typical rural New England village and remained an agrarian community throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."² The region maintained around 4,000 residents until the arrival of the railroad in 1848. The introduction of the train meant that Stamford was less than two hours from New York City. The railroad also caused a boom in manufacturing. By 1850 the population increased to 5,000, and thirty years later this number more than doubled to 11,000.

Stamford's proximity to New York, combined with inexpensive land, and the availability of cheap foreign-born labor enabled many local companies to prosper and expand. The Stamford Manufacturing Company, the St. John Woodworking Company, the Stamford Woolen Mills, and the Yale & Towne Manufacturing Company, employed thousands of workers by the early 1890s.³

¹D. Hamilton Hurd, History of Fairfield County, Connecticut, (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis Co., 1881), 692.

²Wayne Russell, "That Special Blend--Stamford's Melting Pot," Stamford Past and Present, 1641-1976, (Stamford: Stamford Bicentennial Committee, 1976), 67.

³Russell, 67.

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With this expansion of manufacturing came increased traffic on the main artery through town, the Boston Post Road. By the end of World War I, local residents were clamoring for a solution to the vehicular congestion. Unlike other communities along the Merritt that suffered through many conflicts, most residents in Stamford worked together to have the roadway completed as soon as possible.⁴

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Originating in New York State, the Rippowam River forms the Laurel and North Stamford Reservoirs before going under the Merritt Parkway and emptying into Stamford Harbor on the Long Island Sound. The Osborn-Barnes Construction Company of Danbury, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from Guinea Road, in Stamford, to Ponus Ridge Road, in New Canaan (ConnDot project #180-31). While the Rippowam River bridge is located within this section of the Merritt, the bridge contract went to the Paul Bacco Construction Company of Stamford, CT (ConnDot project #180-24).⁵ The bridge cost \$58,635 and was under construction from March 20, 1935, to the spring of 1936. The paving work for this region of the Merritt extended from Wire Mill Road, in Stamford, to Lapham Avenue, in New Canaan. This contract was awarded to the New

⁴"Merritt Parkway Opens," Stamford Advocate, 3 July 1938, p. 1.

⁵Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

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Haven Construction Company of New Haven, CT (ConnDot project# 180-93). The Rippowam River bridge has received little maintenance since it was built.⁶

BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Rippowam River Bridge is a reinforced-concrete arch, spanning 52', with parallel wing walls of varying length. The Merritt Parkway crosses the river at a 26° skew on a 60' wide roadway. The arch springs from a wide, unreinforced-concrete footing to 25' above the springline, forming almost a perfect half circle. The arch thickens from 18" at the crown to 33-1/2" at the footing.

The intrados of the arch is faced with ashlar-cut voussoirs with an uneven radial depth. Each voussoir is drilled for two hooks that are used for attaching the stone voussoirs into the concrete. Rock-faced ashlar masonry is embedded in the spandrel faces and the wing walls. The wing walls are offset out from the arch face, with a battered edge at the frame. Only one pylon occurs, at the northeast corner of the arch, to anchor a low, curved, stone-faced retaining wall along the riverbank.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hurd, D. Hamilton. History of Fairfield County, Connecticut. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis Co., 1881.

Russell, Wayne. "That Special Blend--Stamford's Melting Pot." Stamford Past and Present, 1641-1976. Stamford: Stamford Bicentennial Committee, 1976.

Stamford Bicentennial Committee. Stamford Past and Present, 1641-1976. Stamford: Stamford Bicentennial Committee, 1976.

Stamford Advocate. 1937-1939.

———. Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut

⁶Rippowam River Bridge, DOT #705; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

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Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.

----- Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.